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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: New SD Leader Meets Ambassador, Tries to Sell  
Snake Oil

Refs: (A) Minsk 481, (B) Minsk 607

Classified by Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On July 7, new social democrat leader Aleksandr Kozulin called on Ambassador Krol to give his view of the political opposition in Belarus. Kozulin spent most of the meeting slamming the rest of the opposition for their waste of foreign monies and inability to build their parties. He made it clear his party will not unite with the rest of the opposition. Although he spoke little about himself or his party, he broadly hinted that only he deserves U.S. support. Kozulin discussed the growing fear of Lukashenko among the bureaucracy, and that he explained to Moscow that Lukashenko is a bigger threat to Russia than is the West. While Moscow agreed, he claimed they are afraid Belarus after Lukashenko would turn to the West. Kozulin suggested the U.S. and EU tell Putin they will not oppose a third Putin term in exchange for Moscow removing Lukashenko. End summary.

¶2. (C) On July 7 Ambassador met with Aleksandr Kozulin, new leader of the new Belarusian Social Democratic Party Hramada (BSDPH). This was their first meeting since Kozulin was fired as rector of Belarusian State University in 2003. The BSDPH was formed in January when rebel majorities of Belarus' two previous social democratic parties voted to merge, against the will of their party leaders (ref A). Kozulin was elected head of this new party in April, even though he only entered the party, and politics, in February. The BSDPH avoided problems with legal registration by stealing the name of one of the pre-existing social democratic parties. However, the party was forced to apply to the Ministry of Justice to change its name, as it previously contained the now banned word "Narodnaya" ("People's" or "National", ref B). Surprisingly, the MOJ agreed to the change and registered the new name on June 28, the first time the MOJ has registered a new party since 1999. [Comment: In registering the BSDPH, the MOJ cancelled their registration under their old name, BSDPNG. Rival social democratic leader and (until his recent conviction for leading a protest) presidential candidate Nikolay Statkevich still claims to lead the BSDPNG, which is now unregistered. This blow at Statkevich may be one reason why BSDPH was registered.]

## No Unity Possible

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13. (C) Kozulin opened the meeting by stressing the importance of unity in the opposition. He then spent much of the remainder of the meeting explaining at length the incompetence of all the other opposition leaders. Kozulin claimed they had received millions of dollars in aid over the years, but had nothing to show for it. They could have purchased office space, thereby avoiding the current problem all parties are facing, but are not competent managers. Since Kozulin took over the BSDPH from Statkevich, he said he has been trying to find out what Statkevich did with the hundreds of thousands of dollars the party received from western donors every year. Kozulin called Statkevich a thief, and lamented his party does not have a decent office, a vehicle, or structures in the regions to show for the money.

14. (C) Kozulin accused all the party leaders of being involved in politics only for the money and travel opportunities. None of the other party leaders have the experience he has running a large organization, so they waste any money they receive. He specifically knocked rival social democrat leader Stanislav Shushkevich as living a good life off grants, and the BNF and UCP parties for having become moribund and shadows of their former selves. Because of this lack of experience, none of them could run the country even if elected.

15. (C) Kozulin argued the current process to find a single opposition candidate will lead to disunity as all the candidates want to be the leader and will not cooperate.

Further, their coalition is artificial, uniting nationalists and communists. Although this may work at the top of the parties, Kozulin is convinced lower level party members are deeply unhappy. Lastly, the process itself is flawed. Rather than approaching the people and letting them choose the most popular candidate, the other opposition leaders are focused on a staged process to pick their own candidate. [Note: Kozulin is staying out of this process to find a single candidate. Several sources have reported to Emboffs that Kozulin claims to be waiting for the end of the process, at which point Kozulin and the opposition single candidate "will sit down and decide who will be the real opposition candidate."]

## Newspapers Good, TV and Radio Bad

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16. (C) Turning to foreign aid, Kozulin argued that funding independent television and radio would be helpful, but would take too long to implement. He suggested spending more to help existing print media, which could have a much quicker impact and is cheaper. His party is providing aid to the Narodnaya Volya newspaper and Kozulin's unnamed backers are creating a media holding company to help opposition press. He said they could give USD two million for this project. [Note: this aid explains why Narodnaya Volya has run so many positive articles on Kozulin.]

## Nomenklatura Unhappy

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17. (C) According to Kozulin, Belarus' bureaucrats hate Lukashenko, but will not support an outsider (i.e.- a member of the usual opposition) against him. The bureaucracy sees Lukashenko as a threat, and most fear he could fire or imprison them at any time. In one of the few instances where he spoke about himself, Kozulin mentioned that he was a bureaucrat [implying he could be their candidate]. He credited recent public statements from President Bush and Secretary Rice for making the Belarusian nomenklatura think more deeply about their situation.

## Belarus is a Threat to Russia

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18. (C) Kozulin said he had attended a conference in Moscow organized by Gleb Pavlovskiy the week before. While in Moscow he explained to the Russians how Lukashenko is a dual threat to Russia. Lukashenko is still focused on becoming president of Russia and will use all his wily ways, including supporting the Belarusian-Russian union, to achieve this. Conversely, because Russia supports Lukashenko, the longer Lukashenko stays in power the greater grow anti-Russian feelings in Belarus. Kozulin cited dropping support for union as evidence. He stated Lukashenko is ready to use violence to preserve his tenure, and said any such bloodshed would be blamed on Russia.

19. (C) When he said this in Moscow, Kozulin claimed his Russian interlocutors agreed that Lukashenko is a time bomb and that Russia must change things in Belarus. However, Moscow is afraid to act because they see the U.S. and EU as greater threats and are afraid Lukashenko's successor would bring Belarus to the West. Kozulin suggested the U.S., EU and the OSCE approach Putin and offer him "help" in the 2008 Russian presidential elections in exchange for Moscow removing Lukashenko. Kozulin was convinced Putin would give up "small Belarus" for "help" in 2008. [Comment: although he did not say so outright, Kozulin was hinting that Putin would give up Belarus if the West would acquiesce to his serving a third term.]

110. (C) Comment: Kozulin made no direct appeals for U.S. support, but clearly hinted he is the only one deserving our money. While his description of the rest of the opposition was somewhat accurate, it is disappointing he used his first meeting with the Ambassador since entering politics to criticize his colleagues and say little about

his own plans and activities. Kozulin did not say who is funding his meteoric rise in politics. A Swedish NGO representative who has worked with Belarus' social democrats since 1996 recently told us Kozulin has adopted the worst traits of the stereotypical New Russian, literally throwing rolls of dollar bills at NGO and party leaders to gain their support. The shiny suit, fancy shoes, overpowering cologne and white socks he wore to meet the Ambassador, not to mention shifty eyes and insincere smile, did nothing to dispel that impression. By all accounts Kozulin bought himself the support of a party. He tells us his goal is to challenge Lukashenko; most of the rest of the opposition feels Lukashenko planted him to split the opposition. Whichever is true, further opposition unity is not on the horizon.

KROL